

Who controls Hemingway's legacy?

By MAUREEN DOWD
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FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — For years people have come to Key West to celebrate Papa. The town was small. And it grew large with tourists. The sun was warm and it was good. You could drink a Corsican wine that had a great authority and a low price. It was a very Corsican wine. And at Sloppy Joe's, there were men at the bar with white beards and big bellies who prayed for good bulls and good fish and good Buds.

But the Hemingway Days Festival, a raffish institution in Key West for the last 16 years, was canceled this month. Held every summer near the house where Ernest Hemingway lived from 1929 to 1940, it featured a Hemingway look-alike contest, fish fry and arm-wrestling tournament.

This year, though, the three Hemingway sons — Jack, Patrick and Gregory — threatened to sue if they did not get a 10 percent cut, a fee for past profits and content control.

Michael Whalton, the festival's head, got a letter from Maria Metzner

of Fashion Licensing of America, the family's agent, saying Hemingway Ltd. had exclusive rights "to use and/or exploit the name and likeness of Ernest Hemingway."

Befitting the times we live in, the issue is not whether American icons should be exploited. The issue is whether they should be exploited by strangers or loved ones.

Martin Luther King Jr.'s children are wringing every last dime out of their father's "I Have a Dream" speech with stiff licensing fees. And they sold Oliver Stone the rights to the King story, presumably including Dexter King's embarrassing rapprochement with James Earl Ray.

Like the Kings, the Hemingways happen to have a sacred father, that is to say, a product.

The Hemingway sons were left by their swaggering behemoth of a father with their own festival of dysfunction. Jack begged money from his father. Gregory, who started wearing white gloves and spike heels and calling himself Vicky, once said he had spent a fortune "trying not to be a transvestite," and wrote in his memoir that he felt "profound relief"

when his father died because he could not disappoint him anymore.

Patrick Hemingway, the middle son, had to back off from a plan to market Hemingway shotguns. It was considered tacky, given that Papa killed himself with one. Now they have gone "upscale" to protect that "authentic, masculine and romantic" Hemingway image, in Metzner's words, with a Hemingway Mont Blanc pen for \$600 (it refuses to write long sentences), a line of eyeglasses starting at \$375, and a home-furnishings collection "which reflects the styles of Spain, Africa and Key West." (Hemingway as Martha Stewart.)

Patrick Hemingway claims the festival was not dignified enough. But his own Key West stories include the time he and his father urinated together to put out a fire on a bridge, and the time his father, thinking a neighbor's cat was injured and in pain, shot it in the head. The cat survived. Some Great White Hunter.

He said his father did not like cheap knock-offs. When a place called the Stork Club opened in Key West, his father, a friend of the original Stork Club owner, went and demanded that it be shut down at once.

"The money is important," the amiable Hemingway said from his home in Bozeman, Mont. "But those people down there give an image of Ernest Hemingway that is crude, as sort of a beachcomber. It's nasty, like when my dad visited the Bahamas and they made up a song, 'Big Fat Slob in the harbor, tonight's the night we got fun.' Nobody would say my father wasn't a drinker. But it was not the core of who he was."

Whalton contends that the writer would be more appalled to see an outfit called Fashion Licensing of America peddling his image than he would be to see a bunch of guys who look like him.

Patrick Hemingway talks about a symposium at the Kennedy Library honoring the 100th anniversary of his father's birth. But it may be too late to get the toothpaste back in the tube. Hemingway was already a parody of himself when he died.

Now, along with other macho writers such as Jack London, Irwin Shaw and Norman Mailer, his work has gone out of fashion. Book club readers who swoon over "The English Patient" titter at the idea of reading the superior "Farewell to Arms." He has been booted off college curriculums filled with more multiculturally correct, if not always as talented, women, minority and gay writers.

The only lesson here may be that there's nothing more valuable in life than obscure parents.

The writer is a columnist for The New York Times.

BEST SELLERS (PAPERBACKS)

FICTION

1. The Runaway Jury by John Grisham
2. Invasion by Robin Cook
3. Kickback by Dean Koppitz
4. Stones from the River by Lydia Medel
5. He's Come Undone by Wally Lamb
6. The English Patient by Michael Ondaatje
7. The Wild Baron by Catherine Coulter
8. Acts of War created by Tom Clancy and Steve Pieczonis
9. The Last Don by Mario Puzo
10. The Blackstone Chronicles: Part 1-4 by John Seel
11. Lily White by Susen Isaac
12. Floaters by Joseph Wambaugh
13. Shadows of Empire by Steve Perry
14. That Camden Summer by Lisa Marie Spencer
15. The Wedding by Julie Garwood

NON-FICTION

1. Spontaneous Healing by Andrew Weil
2. Outrage by Vincent Bugliosi
3. The Color of Water by James McBride
4. Reviving Ophelia by Mary Pipher
5. A Civil Action by Jonathan Harr
6. How the Irish Saved Civilization by Thomas Cahill
7. Girlfriends by Carmen Ronson Berry and Tamara Traubler
8. The Cloister-Walk by Kathleen Norris
9. The Demon-Haunted World by Carl Sagan
10. Into the Wild by Jon Krakauer
11. Hitler's Willing Executioners by Daniel Jonah Goldhagen
12. The Liar's Club by Mary Kay Vaughan
13. An Unquiet Mind by Kay Redfield Jamison
14. Donnie Brasco by Joseph D. Pistone with Richard Woodley

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